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STATE FOR INL, EB, AND INR
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SUBJECT: HONDURAN VICE PRESIDENT UNSETTLES MADURO
GOVERNMENT WITH ACCUSATIONS OF CORRUPTION

Classified By: Political Counselor Francisco Palmieri;
Reasons 1.5 (B) and (D).

1. (U) On October 21, Honduran Vice President Armida de Lopez Contreras (one of three presidential designates in the current Honduran constitutional leadership structure) stirred up a hornets nest when she accused an unnamed high ranking Government of Honduras (GOH) official of tampering with USD 24 million in international development aid. The Vice President's public remarks left ministers scurrying for cover, drawing the ire of some of President Maduro's closest advisors.

2. (C) While Contreras has yet to identify the name of the accused, the Honduran press narrowed the list to three possible individuals who have access to these particular development funds: Mariano Jimenez, Minister of Agriculture; Jorge Carranza, Minister of Transportation; and Elias Lizardo, Minister of Health. All three ministers deny any wrongdoing. The Embassy learned from another source, however, that the corrupt official is allegedly Roberto Rodrigo Castillo Callejas, who earned the nickname. Roberto "Ladron" (Thief) Castillo during the previous Nationalist government of Rafael Callejas. Castillo is a senior GOH advisor who reports directly to the Casa Presidencial. Contreras also confided that Minister Jimenez is the one who is refusing to follow established anti-corruption procedures.

3. (U) The USD 24 million has been earmarked by the GOH to fund a development project along its northern border with El Salvador and Guatemala known as Plan Trifinio. The project is funded jointly by the Inter-American Development Bank and the Central American Bank for Economic Integration.

4. (U) In a follow-up interview on October 22 with the press, Contreras claimed various high ranking GOH officials have attempted to intimidate her by threatening to strip her of all her official duties. She mentioned by name Jorge Ramon Hernandez, Minister of Government, Ramon Medina Luna, Maduro's National Security Advisor, and Luis Cosenza, Minister of the Presidency. Contreras vowed that she would not be cowed and would continue her campaign to bring transparency to public finances.

5. (C) Comment: Armida Lopez Contreras has been a moving force in the GOH's greatly improved drug interdiction effort. She has taken firm control and leadership of the moribund National Council to Combat Drug Trafficking and is forcing GOH law enforcement agencies to work together. She has spoken forthrightly about drug trafficking corruption and worked hard to improve the GOH's interdiction capabilities. However, she is not a part of the President's inner circle of advisors. There is an underlying political isolation to her role in the government as well. She possesses enormous fortitude and determination to carry out her policy responsibilities and to pursue program goals, such as her under-funded demand reduction program, "Si Se Puede." Her frustration with government ministries that refuse to carry out their work or worse (misdirecting or stealing funds), apparently boiled over in this incident. Finally, she also harbors ambitions of running for the Presidency, perhaps even in this next election cycle; although her name has not been mentioned recently as a possible candidate. End Comment.
Palmer